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Lyrical Poems

By Henrik Ibsen

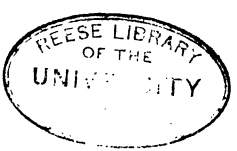
LONDON: ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET, W.

LYRICAL POEMS
BY HENRIK IBSEN

LYRICAL POEMS

BY HENRIK IBSEN

SELECTED AND TRANSLATED
BY R. A. STREATFEILD



LONDON
ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET
1902

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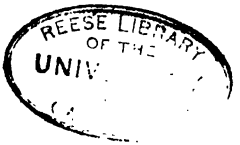


Minstrels

THROUGH the long bright nights of summer
In spirit to her I clave,
But the way, it led by the torrent,
Where the gloomy alders wave.

"Ho, know'st thou the terror and music
Can thrall the soul of a maid,
Through the mighty halls and temples,
To follow thee unafraid?"

I drew the sprite from his cavern,
His music bewitched my life,
But ere I had learnt his secret,
The maid was my brother's wife.

MINSTRELS

In the mighty halls and temples
I sing to myself alone,
But the cataract's terror and music
Sound ever an undertone.

Building Plans

How clearly I remember,
As though 'twere yesterday,
The evening my first poem
In print before me lay.

I sat within my garret
And read it o'er and o'er,
And smoked my pipe and dreamed of all
The future had in store.

"I'll build a palace in the clouds,
Shall fill the North with light,
A turret shall my palace have,
And a tower of dizzy height.

High in the lofty tower
  Shall dwell a deathless bard,
And in the turret chamber
  A maiden fair I'll guard."

I thought that in my scheme there seemed
  A wondrous harmony,
But soon confusion followed,
  My plans went all awry.

My tower was not high enough,
  No room the poet found;
My turret split asunder
  And tumbled to the ground!

The Miner

Break in thunder, wall of rock,
At my hammer's tempest-shock;
Myriad voices of the mine
Call me to its inmost shrine.

Glittering spirits beckon me
To their sunless treasury,
Veinèd gold all burning bright,
Diamond and chrysolite.

In the mountain's gloomy breast
Silence dwells and endless rest;
Break a pathway, hammer mine,
To the mountain's inmost shrine!

THE MINER

Once I loved the earth so fair,
Sun and stars and boundless air,
Childlike gaily wandering
Down the flowery path of Spring.

But I have forgot the light
In the gloom of endless night,
And the forest's hymn divine
In the cloisters of the mine.

Here I came in guileless youth,
Eager in my search for truth,
Here an answer thought to find
To the doubts that rack my mind.

All is silence, all is gloom
In the mountain's living tomb;
Not a ray my path to clear,
Not a voice my soul to cheer.

Have I failed, then? Does the way
Lead not to the upper day?
Yet I know the heaven's light
Would but blind my dazzled sight.

No! the goal is deeper yet,
There is peace eternal set;
Cleave a pathway, hammer mine,
To the mountain's inmost shrine.

What though darkness be my lot,
Strike, my hammer, falter not;
What though every hope be vain,
Strike, my hammer, strike amain.

The Eiderduck

THE Eiderduck dwells in the Northman's land,
Where the grey waves wash the frozen strand.

She plucks the tender down from her breast,
To make a lining warm for her nest.

The fisher recks naught of her loving care,
He climbs to the nest and plucks it bare.

But what though the fisher her store hath ta'en,
She strips her bosom yet once again.

Once more he robs her, and yet once more
She lines her nest from her bounteous store.

The third time, the last time her nest is laid
bare,
Then she spreads her wings to the warm Spring
air.

With breast all bleeding she cleaves the night,
To the south, to the south, to the land of light!

Burnt Ships

"FAREWELL to the Norland,
Farewell to my home;
To the land of the Wine god
I fly o'er the foam."

The lights of the Norland
Have sunk in the waves,
He has found in the south
All the bliss that he craves.

His ships he has burnt,
But the smoke-wreaths that rise
Have built o'er the waters
A bridge in the skies.

BURNT SHIPS

Each day to the northward
When twilight has flown,
There rides through the darkness
A horseman alone.

A Duet

AGNES, my butterfly, dainty and light,
O'er the heather so airily winging,
I am weaving a net to stay thy flight,
And the net is the song I'm singing.

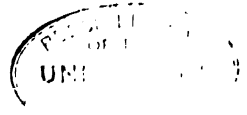
Am I a butterfly, joyous and gay,
Let me drink from the harebell's chalice,
And art thou a lad, that loves to play,
Then chase me, but not in malice.

Agnes, my butterfly, blithesome and fresh,
In vain dost thou trust to thy flying,
My net it is woven with silken mesh,
And therein wilt thou soon be lying.

A DUET

Am I a butterfly, frolic and free,
I flit through my airy dominions;
And if I must truly thy prisoner be,
O crush not my delicate pinions.

No! gently I'll take thee thy harebells among
And gather thee close to my breast,
And there shalt thou play thy whole life long
The game that thy heart loves best.



With a Gift of Water Lilies

See, my beloved, what I bring,
White lilies from the woodland spring;
They floated on its waters there,
Dream-laden in the summer air.

I'll tell thee how to guard them best:
Lay them upon thy virgin breast,
And in thy bosom's rise and fall
Their native waters they'll recall

Beware, my child, the woodland stream,
'Tis perilous by its waves to dream;
Above, the lilies ope their eyes,
Below, the Neckan watching lies.

WITH A GIFT OF WATERLILIES

Thy bosom, child, is like the stream,
I dare not linger there to dream:
Above, the virgin lilies blow,
The unsleeping Neckan lies below.

A Bird Song

Once up and down the garden
We wandered in the Spring,
And life seemed like a melody
That fairy voices sing.

The west wind breathed upon us,
The heaven was blue and deep.
A mother bird sat on a spray
And sang her brood to sleep.

I painted poet-pictures
In colours rich and rare,
And two bright eyes grew brighter,
And two fair cheeks more fair.

A BIRD SONG

The linnets in the lime-tree
Sang love-songs clear and plain,
But we—we took a fond farewell,
And never met again.

Now up and down the garden
I wander all alone,
And the linnets' song it wearies me
With its dreary monotone.

For the birds they heard us talking
That day so long ago,
And they made a song about us,
The words and music too.

And now in every lime-tree
The linnets sit and sing
About a pair of human fools
And a wondrous day in Spring.

A Cradle Song

Now fades the roof above his head
To the blue star-vault on high,
Now flies my little Haakon up
On dream-wings through the sky.

There is a golden ladder set
From earth to God's own seat,
And shining angels hover round
To guide my darling's feet.

God's cherubim are watching o'er
His cot the long night through;
God guard thee, little Haakon mine,
Thy mother watches too.

Gone!

I FOLLOWED the guests to the gateway,
And stood for a moment there;
The breath of our farewells lingered
And died on the dewy air.

I turned to the house in silence,
The dancers all were gone;
The garden was cold and gloomy,
And I was left alone.

The mirth and the music were over,
The darkness had followed the day—
She was only the guest of an evening,
She had come and had passed away.

The Power of Memory

You laugh when you see a tame bear dance;
Do you know how they teach the beast to prance?

In a brewer's cauldron they tie him tight,
And pile up the furnace and set it alight.

Then a barrel organ they bring along,
And play to the bear "Love's old sweet song."

In a minute or so he begins to grill,
And he needs must dance, for he can't stand still.

So whenever he hears the tune that he knows,
A dancing devil flies into his toes.

I too in the cauldron once was bound,
And the furnace blazed, and the organ ground.

The flames of hell, I have felt their power,
And I carry the scars to this very hour.

And whenever thoughts of that time arise,
I feel the pang like a stab in the eyes.

And deep in my brain the iron goes,
And I needs must dance on my metric toes.

Bird and Birdcatcher

Once an osier cage I made
  When a boy, and quick as thought
  In the fields a bird I caught,
Home with glee my prize conveyed.

Then I danced in grim delight
  Round the cage, and with grimace,
  Grin, and many an antic face
Drove the captive wild with fright.

Tired of all this noisy rout,
  Different tortures next I tried,
  Drew the cage's bars aside,
Let the trembling prisoner out.

See, he lifts his little head,
  Life and freedom his again!
  Flutters 'gainst the window-pane,
Drops upon the carpet, dead.

Thou'rt avenged, poor prisoner!
  Captive now thy captor lies,
  Close his dungeon barriers rise,
Scarce his limbs have strength to stir.

Him, too, an unsleeping eye
  In his prison cell surveys,
  And beneath that awful gaze
Reels his brain in agony.

Sometimes, as he thinks, the door
  Opens wide, and freedom calls.
  Vain! with broken wings he falls
Bruised and bleeding on the floor.

A Swan

O MY white swan, my silent singer,
All thy life long
No breath of song
Revealed the fount of music in thy breast.
Jealously watched, the sleeping spirit
It dwelt apart
Within thy heart,
And silently thou glidedst to thy rest.

But at that hour when earth fell from thee,
When eyes and tongue
Could do no wrong,

A SWAN

From out thy dying lips a voice uprose.
Thou wert a swan! Thy death was music!
The hour that broke
Thy fleshly yoke
Bade all thy soul in rapturous song unclose.

To the Survivors!

Now rings his fame secure at last,
But he beyond these things hath passed.

He lit a torch that roused the land;
Ye borrowed it his brow to brand.

He taught ye how to grasp a sword,
And with it his life blood ye poured.

He waged fierce fight with powers of hell,
And slain by his own men he fell.

And he is dead, and ye have sold
Your birthright for the stranger's gold.

So let it be! but calm and deep,
O thorn-crowned warrior, be thy sleep.

A Poet of the Night

Long since, when I was a schoolboy,
I was just as brave as the rest,
At least till the sun descended
Behind the mountain's crest.

But when the shades of evening
Crept over land and sea,
The spectres of ancient story
Came forth and frighted me.

They came from tale and legend,
They gathered round my bed;
I lay in my cot and trembled,
And scarce dared lift my head.

A change has now come o'er me,
And now I fear the day;
At the first grey gleam of morning
My courage ebbs away.

The cruel devils of daylight
And all the din of life,
They rack my soul with horror
And cut me like a knife.

But the trailing robes of terror
Of the vast and awful night,
They rouse my timorous spirit
And fill me with strange delight.

I reck not of storm and tempest,
Like an eagle in clouds I soar,
And I laugh at fear and sorrow—
Till the morning breaks once more.

And if I aught have written,
That shall not perish quite,
'Tis thou that hast inspired me,
O strong and terrible night.

Thanks

HER griefs, they are the perils,
That round my pathway rise;
Her joys, they are the spirits,
That bear me to the skies.

Her home, it is the ocean,
That pathless, shoreless deep,
Whereon the poet's shallop
Is rocked in trancèd sleep.

Her kinsmen are the shadows,
That march in aëry ring,
With bugle and with banner,
Through all the songs I sing.

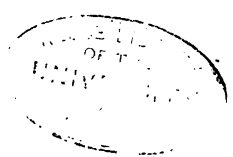
THANKS

Her work, it is to kindle
  The vision of my mind,
Yet so that none discover
  The soul that moves behind.

And just because she recks not
  Of all the thanks I owe,
I make and print this poem
  To show her that I know.

Epilogue

LIFE—'tis in brain and heart
A battle with a troll:
Poetry—'tis a court
Of judgment on the soul.



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